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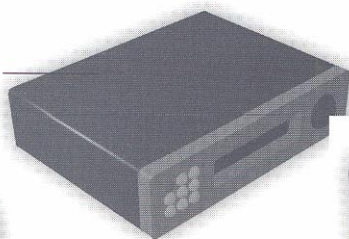
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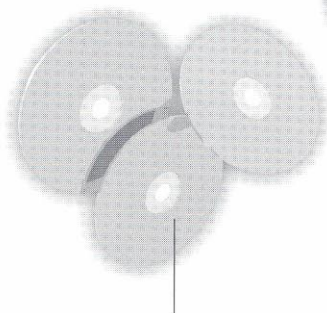
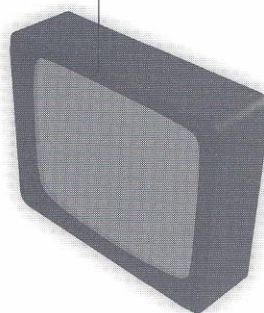
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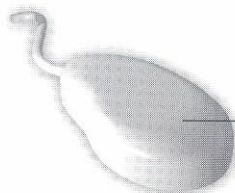
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IN THIS ISSUE

OPENERS

- Alliance National Board listing **2**
Information: the Currency of Democracy, *Bunnie Riedel* **3**
Public Space Essential to Community, *Rob Brading* **5**

- About this Issue, *Jennifer A. Krebs* **7**
Government Channel Policies, *Brad Clark* **8**
Government Access Helps
Redefine the Community, *Jeffrey Hansell* **9**
The Miami Valley Cable Council, *Richard Diaz & Ric Hayes* **10**
On the Air, *Tom Bryson* **12**
Teaming Government Access
with Public Safety, *Joseph C. Keefe* **13**
Ballot Measures & Candidates, *Shannon O'Connor* **14**
Austin, TX – Live Music Capital
of the World, *Patricia Garlinghouse* **16**
City TV on the Web, *Keith A. Kurtz & Roslyn Wythe* **17**
World Webcasting, *Michael White* **18**
Marketing Government Access Channels, *Robin Gee* **19**
If You Build It They Will Come..., *Brian Wilson* **21**
Municipal Radio for Emergency Use, *J. Fred Miller* **23**

As the journal of the Alliance for Community Media, Community Media Review shall support the Alliance mission by providing: a comprehensive overview of past, present and future issues critical to the Alliance and its membership; vigorous and thoughtful debate on those issues; and a venue for members and like-minded groups to present issues critical to the Alliance.

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Information: the Currency of Democracy

by **Bunnie Riedel**

Executive Director,
Alliance for Community Media

Dirk Koning, executive director of Community Media Center (Grand Rapids, Michigan), uses a quote attributed to Thomas Jefferson on various promotional items and stationery. It reads "Information is the Currency of Democracy."

It is our American tradition of the free flow of information and its establishment in the Constitution that continues to make this "experiment in democracy" grow. One look around the globe shows that places where information cannot freely flow are places where democracy cannot take root and certainly cannot flourish.

Government access television is a critical pillar of community media because it contributes to the health of our democracy. The simple act of taking cameras into the city or county council chambers honors the democratic ideal of citizen participation in the workings of government. It gives viewers the ability to stay informed without the interference of third party interpretation (by the press) or public relations "spin" by special interests. City and county council meetings are delivered raw and uncut directly to the living rooms of constituents, and citizens are able to participate almost as if they had physically attended the meeting. Among my favorite access anecdotes are the stories of cars suddenly pulling into the city hall parking lot and people who had been watching the meeting on access pouring into the chambers so they could participate in public comment.

Along with citizen participation, I have met numerous police, fire and health department workers who use government access to inform the public. Whether it's crime or fire prevention, bicycle safety, blood pressure screenings, HIV clinics, utility services or municipal bus routes; helping people to access existing government services contributes to the quality of their lives and the quality of the community.

In our ongoing struggle for media democracy, we must be vigilant against separating ourselves into rivaling factions. We must develop an "all for one, one for all" mentality. A great many access operations do all three parts of PEG, but even in municipalities where PEG is separately managed, each must support the other or risk being weakened.



For all these reasons, I am always surprised to learn that a community does not have Government access. There's so much to benefit and so little to lose when municipal government opens itself up to the community and actively seeks to do community outreach. It is understandable that when the idea is first proposed to put cameras in city or county council chambers, there is hesitancy (no one wants to look bad on TV). We find that the initial hesitancy is quickly overcome as community leaders begin to get feed-back from the community. Typically the response is quite positive and a genuine community dialogue is established.

We also find that it doesn't take long for service providers such as police, fire and health departments to realize the power of this medium. Government access helps to re-enforce community policing models which so many municipalities are turning to, and it certainly allows fire and health agencies to increase education designed to reduce the incidence of sickness, injury or even death.

Whether Government access is separate from Public and Educational access or is part of a PEG operation, it is an essential element in the access picture. Frequently, the access community focuses on the challenges to Public access and how vulnerable Public access is to budget cuts or political fortune, but I have found equally formida-

ble challenges to Government access and those who work or volunteer in it. Sometimes the challenge is whether or not operating revenue will be cut or adequate facilities and equipment will be provided. Sometimes the challenge is municipal leaders who believe that Government access is designed to serve personal agendas rather than the needs of the public.

In our ongoing struggle for media democracy, we must be vigilant against separating ourselves into rivaling factions. We must develop an "all for one, one for all" mentality. A great many access operations do all three parts of PEG, but even in municipalities where PEG is separately managed, each must support the other or risk being weakened. Also, there is much to be said for the cross-germination of ideas, resources and human capital.

The service that Government access renders to the community is immeasurable. The men and women who work and volunteer in Government access are dedicated servants of democracy. Their work ensures that all of us can be part of a truly participatory process and that our communities are better places to live.

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Public Space Essential to Community

by Rob Brading

One of my favorite quotes comes from baseball executive Branch Rickey who said "Luck is the residue of design." I sometimes wonder if this nation's founders foresaw outcomes or were simply masters of design. It's not the least bit clever or insightful or original to say that the founders of this country were possessed of great genius, but it seems that some outcomes have far outstripped what they envisioned.

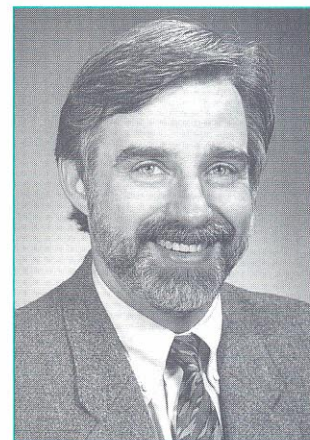
So I don't know if the founders realized what they were about when they wrote the First Amendment. Maybe the religion clause was just a classic political fudge, leaving others to fight it out on specific issues. Or maybe they knew that by guaranteeing no establishment of religion while banning laws restricting the free expression of religion, they were establishing not just an often confusing and perplexing tension, but a balance that has enabled the religion clause to meet changing times and changing needs. The tension in the religion clause is readily apparent and easy to see. The founders couldn't possibly foresee the conflicts we'd face today but they created a vehicle that, more than 200 years later, continues to frame how we discuss, argue about and resolve those issues.

Given that, maybe they knew also what they were doing when they wrote the free speech clause. The free speech clause holds a similar duality but it's more often ignored or missed.

Typical free speech arguments revolve around an individual's right to speak. In community media we are often put in the position of defending the free speech rights of others, and frequently we end up defending the rights of others even when we loathe their message. But sometimes I think we're on the wrong side of this issue.

No, I'm not suggesting we abandon defending an individual's right to speak. I am suggesting that we also become defenders of the choice implied in the free speech clause. Whether or not it was intentional, the free speech clause does more than simply protect an individual's right to a soap box; it also protects our

The free speech clause isn't fundamental to democracy just because it guarantees a soap box or even the right to be heard, but because it establishes an arena, a public space where citizens can discuss, interpret and understand issues that bear upon their common life.



right to hear. Few of us want someone else, someone other than ourselves, determining what we can read, listen to or watch. Even those who advocate censorship don't very often argue that someone else should be telling them, the censors, what they should have access to. We usually believe, with good reason, that we as individuals are the best arbiters of what we want to see, read and listen to.

Beyond our concerns as individuals, beyond protecting our individual right to speak and to hear, democratic political life requires the ability for citizens to tell their stories, to discuss the merits of their individual, and their communities', conditions. Telling those stories, creating a place for both speaking and hearing, requires public space. The free speech clause isn't fundamental to democracy just because it guarantees a soap box or even the right to be heard, but because it establishes an arena, a public space where citizens can discuss, interpret and understand issues that bear upon their common life.

Judge Learned Hand wrote that the free speech clause "presupposes that right conclusions are more likely to be gathered out of a multitude of tongues, than through any authoritative selection." It may seem like a lifetime—or several lifetimes—ago, but even the Supreme Court has ruled (*Red Lion Broadcasting v. FCC*, 1969 and *Metro Broadcasting v. FCC*, 1990) that the free speech clause's ultimate goal is to create a well-informed citizenry. The Supreme

Court and Hand recognized that genuine free speech creates a fertile dialogue where issues and ideas can be discussed and compromises reached, a process where many, rather than a few, participate. In Hand's words, "To many this is, and always will be, folly; but we have staked upon it our all."

The rise of electronic media makes creating this public space even more challenging. The value of channel space, of access to technology, of learning how to use technology, the real value of community media is not simply as free speech fora, but as a public space carved out to build social relationships, to promote dialogue and solutions in our communities, to help build community.

Rob Brading is chairman of the Alliance for Community Media and executive director of Multnomah Community Television in Gresham, Oregon, email rbrading@mctv.org, telephone 503.491.7636 x318.



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For the past 10 years, the Alliance for Communications Democracy has been fighting to preserve and strengthen access. Though the odds against us have been high, and the mega-media, corporate foes well-heeled and powerful, time and again we've won in the courts. We can't continue this critical work without your support. With the ramifications of the 1996 Telecommunications Act only now beginning to manifest themselves, we must be vigilant if we are to prevail and preserve democratic communications.

If not us, who? If not now, when? Please join the Alliance for Communications Democracy today!

Welcome to the Spring 2000 issue of *Community Media Review* and the first one to focus exclusively on Government access. As I approached this issue, I was unsure what boundaries to establish. How is Government access defined in the year 2000? Does it refer to civic meeting coverage? Websites? Information services?

As it turns out, Government access has come to encompass a great variety of information and services as local governments use media in increasingly innovative and creative ways to convey their messages to the people. A sample of these offerings is included in this issue. We begin with a discussion of policies for Government access channels from **Brad Clark** of Madison, Wisconsin; hear about how Government access contributes to a community's definition of itself from **Jeffrey Hansell** of Malden, Massachusetts; and learn about local governments collaborating for success from **Richard Diaz** and **Ric Hayes** of the Miami Valley Cable Council in Ohio. We then turn to specific programming examples: how to enhance typical meeting coverage and make information more accessible for citizens from **Tom Bryson** of Farmers Branch, Texas; how Government channels can work with public safety entities to contribute to a safer environment from **Joe Keefe** of Coral Gables, Florida; and how Government channels can work with local civic and new groups for comprehensive public affairs programming from **Shannon O'Connor** of Contra Costa County, California. Next we look at some innovative uses of Government communications: the first from **Patricia Garlinghouse** about the Austin Music Network, a civic music channel from Austin, Texas; and about two examples of webstreaming, one from **Keith Kurtz** and **Roslyn Wythe** in Santa Monica, California, and from **Michael White**, about a cooperative project in Bloomington, Indiana. Next, the issue examines ways to get the message across: how to market Government channels from **Robin Gee** of Santa Monica; and **Brian Wilson** of Tacoma, Washington examines the process used by Tacoma to ensure the use of advanced information technologies for the benefit of its citizens. In the final article, Anchorage, Kentucky City Manager **J. Fred Miller** discusses his city's emergency and informative city radio. The array of ways that local governments are using to get messages across to citizens is impressive and ever expanding.

All access practitioners can learn from these examples to develop and promote community-based media. My tremendous thanks go to all the contributors for meeting tight time deadlines and being very generous with their information and assistance.

— Jennifer A. Krebs

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GOVERNMENT ACCESS

COMMUNICATING WITH THE COMMUNITY

GOVERNMENT CHANNEL POLICIES

DON'T ROLL TAPE WITHOUT 'EM!

by Brad Clark

Government access channels can often get caught between the divergent expectations of their various audiences. For example, while the mission statement of most channels like **The Madison City Channel** is to “make local government accessible to residents,” the definition of “accessible” may not be the same to a member of the public watching a council meeting compared to an elected official who’s at that meeting debating policy. Their agendas may be very different. What’s more, since most such channels are government agencies, there can be further tension between their legitimate role as a conduit for disseminating information on government services and policies and the desire to provide avenues for in-depth debate over those policies.

These tensions highlight the importance of having specific policies in place to proactively deal with potential conflicts and controversies. Let’s examine why those policies are so important and look at some areas that should be addressed.

First, it’s important that a channel have a mission, clearly stated and signed off on by appropriate elected officials. Such a statement may consist of no more than a sentence or two, or it may be fleshed out by very specific prioritized areas of programming (check out Madison City Channel’s home page at www.ci.madison.wi.us/mcc12/ for our guidelines).

This mission should address the biggest single policy decision you’ll face: What kind of programming will your channel carry? In the case of a government channel, the odds are pretty good that programming will include at least some of the following: coverage of local government meetings; emergency information; candidate forums; coverage of special hearings; press conferences, etc.; public affairs programs that highlight specific government services or issues; and character-generated information. The main advantage, of course, of getting specific and prioritizing the types of programming you carry is that it settles issues before they come up. In Madison, nothing supercedes our coverage of our Common Council—the policy-making entity of Madison.

Another important policy to set is: Who has access to the channel? Remember, this is not Public Access, whose *raison d’être* is to make the medium of television itself accessible to the public. Government Access makes the workings of government accessible to the public through the medium of television. This difference generally means that members of the public are not free to walk through the doors of City Channel and expect to produce a television program themselves; most government channels limit that kind of access to city or other government agencies or non-profit organizations. This issue needs to be addressed. The last thing I as a manager of a government station want is a call from a citizen (or worse yet, an alderperson!) with “a great idea for a show” if I have no guidelines or policies by which to assess their idea.

The same goes for advocacy. At MCC-12 we’ve decided that some advocacy on issues (especially in our public affairs programming) is appropriate, as long as all sides are represented. Certainly, forums with candidates for local offices in one sense

represent advocacy to its extreme. We do feel that the candidate forums we produce (with the help and political cover of the League of Women Voters) are a great service to voters. On the other hand, we also produce a show in which our mayor—an elected official—addresses current issues without someone representing an opposing view there to counter. Our mayor is the elected “CEO” of the city, and in that sense does set the policy agenda for Madison. So it’s a fine line, but one which we have spelled out.

Needless to say, I’ve only touched on the many policies that every government station needs to consider. What’s prohibited? How does new programming get initiated, approved, and funded? What about copyright? Election coverage? Dubs of programming and retention of tapes? I’m sure that there is an end to the possible questions—I just haven’t seen it yet! What we’ve tried to do in Madison (like many other jurisdictions) is deal with as many practical policy issues as we can and put our best judgments down on paper.

We have also made a very conscious effort to involve elected officials in determining these policies (or at least, signing off on what we think the policies should be). This forestalls temptations on the part of some to attempt to (mis)use our channel for their own purpose, and quite frankly also provides us with political cover. It also helps instill into these stakeholders a sense of ownership in what we’re trying to accomplish with our channel, and not only is that handy come budget time, it’s simply the right course for a local government channel to follow.

In determining (and revising, as circumstances warrant) policies, we utilize drafts of proposed policies, memos (or even better, face-to-face meetings when possible) to the mayor and alders explaining our rationale for the policies, and the help of supportive alders to sponsor such measures, guide them through the adoption process, and speak to them in committee or council meetings. Our mission and the policy guidelines you can find on our website have all been officially adopted as city policy.

In dealing with these types of policy issues, communication is vital. As mentioned, many elected officials will be flattered by your even asking them to help you set the appropriate policy for, say, dubs of programs. Don’t forget, we’re city staff and as such are presumably the experts in running a government television station; they’re elected representatives of the public, and together the goal is a partnership in how to best serve the citizens of your community. To the extent that you are proactive, open, and clear about the process, you have the opportunity to forge long-term alliances with important members of your community that can only benefit both your station and the public you’re there to serve over the years.

If you’d like more information on Government Access channel policies, please contact the National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors (NATOA) at 703.506.3275.

Brad Clark is station manager of Madison City Channel, Madison, Wisconsin. Contact him at bclark@ci.madison.wi.us



GOVERNMENT ACCESS HELPS REDEFINE THE COMMUNITY

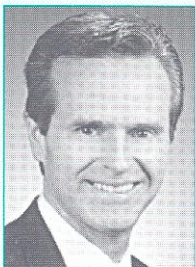
by Jeffrey Hansell

For most of its existence, Malden, Massachusetts has been a typical, working-class industrial town. Located just north of Boston, it offered a better life and new freedoms to many Italian and Irish immigrants coming to America in the 18th and 19th centuries.

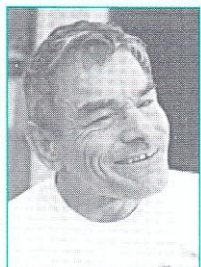
Today, as Malden celebrates its 350th year, it is undergoing a profound transformation into a city of technology and a leader in K-12 education. With five schools under construction and a regional telecommunications park on the horizon, Malden is also becoming a home for a whole new generation of immigrants. One result is that MATV Channel 16 is becoming a vital information link for an old town embracing a new identity. Several local leaders and residents spoke out on the growing importance of the governmental access channel in Malden:

Richard C. Howard, Mayor

"We use Channel 16 on every level, from putting out basic information about weather emergencies and departmental announcements, to televising community meetings and events, to producing regular studio shows. I see the Internet and I-NET as a good complement to the government access channel. When completed, our joint project with the neighboring cities of Everett and Medford—"Telecom City"—could be an excellent platform for a regional governmental access channel, as well as a distance learning network."



Sonny Kelly, Advocate for the Disabled Community



"I see more programs are appearing on the government access channel, I think some people are still not convinced of its real value to the community. But if our city councilors used it to give people a better idea of what is going on, they would get better ideas back from the public. A more informed electorate will give more informed feedback. Besides that, the tri-city telecommunications park affects a lot of people and Channel 16 could be used even more to advise everyone about the progress and problems in getting this idea off of the ground."



Dr. Cynthia Fiducia, Executive Director, TRITEC

"As Telecom City becomes a reality, we can produce more access shows focussing on the need for continued collaboration between our three towns. It



is a unique situation where a regional government access network can help attract much-needed public and private investment to the area. However I do not want to lose the personal community touch by creating a larger entity. MATV's Channel 16 facilitates a process by which Malden residents are not merely recipients of government services, but become involved in shaping those services as well."

Mohamed Ziani, Voices in Action

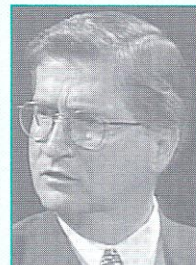


"Speaking on behalf of the immigrant community, I think that Channel 16 can be a great tool to teach people how government works, especially ordinary citizens. It can empower more people to involve

themselves in the local political process. If more of Malden's leaders invited regular folks onto Channel 16 to speak and be heard on their concerns, more people would see it a credible source of information. I think every home in Malden should be able to get all three access channels whether or not they subscribe to cable TV."

Chris Fallon, State Representative

"I only began my show, *Beacon Hill Perspective*, last fall on MATV. Each month I try to bring up issues and topics that affect the quality of life for my constituents. At minimum, we talk about the matters of the most concern to the people I represent. Audience response to the show has been significant and positive. I would like to produce two new shows per month and ultimately go 'live'. Our government access channel is a good forum for me."



Jeffrey Hansell is executive director of Malden Access TV, 145 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA 02148, telephone 781.321.6400, fax 781.321.7121, or email at jeffhansell@zdnetwork.com

THE MIAMI VALLEY CABLE COUNCIL

A COOPERATIVE APPROACH TO GOVERNMENT ACCESS

by Richard Diaz & Ric Hayes

You may have noticed a small trend in business lately; a slight increase in the number of companies merging to form bigger, multi-faceted corporations, which we all know can only benefit the consumer. Seriously though, there are some parallels to this in the realm of public access, and they have provided better services, and better opportunities, to its cities and citizens. One such place is the Miami Valley Cable Council.

The Miami Valley Cable Council was created 25 years ago, in 1975. Its original focus was to regulate and produce cable television for our participating cities, but the founders had the foresight to incorporate as a general-purpose Council of Governments (COG). This means we operate as an independent government entity with the flexibility to change as the needs of our member cities dictate. This COG has two primary purposes; to pool its resources to provide enhanced PEG access to its eight cities, and to fund and offer government services too prohibitive for one city alone.

The "Cable Council" serves as our policy-making board and is comprised of elected city officials from our member cities. MVCC serves the 45,891 cable subscribers in the southern Dayton suburbs with a penetration rate of 72 percent. Our main source of revenue is the 5 percent cable franchise fee, which is paid directly to MVCC from Time-Warner. The franchise fee provided 96 percent of our total income of \$1,245,690 in 1999.

The Origins of MVCC. MVCC had humble beginnings. We began cablecasting in 1978 on one channel using black and white reel to reel equipment from the basement of a church in Kettering, Ohio. Today, MVCC owns a 12,000 square foot building, operates four access channels—two for local governments, one for schools, and one for the public—and can go live from eight council chambers and other spots throughout our cities.

Government Access is the primary function of the cable television department and is supported in various ways. More staff are allocated to this function and more sophisticated equipment is dedicated solely for GATV productions. Government access programs are recorded on Beta or DVC Pro tape formats and typically edited on non-linear systems (Avid Xpress and Flyer Toaster).

Staffing includes a full-time government production supervisor, part-time Government Producer, three part-time production assistants and community volunteers. Collectively they covered 192 live city council meetings and worked over 3,200 hours to produce 150 hours of edited and/or studio programs. This resulted in a total of 2,678 hours of local programming cablecast on the two GATV channels in 1999.

The eight cities that comprise MVCC range in size from the small Village of Germantown to the larger urban area of Kettering. Our television services are designed to fit the unique needs of each municipality, resulting in a diverse array of shows each year. Some of the more innovative programs include:

▲ *Kettering Daily*, a 15-minute newscast taped each morning

and replayed five times each day.

▲ *Take 5 with Kettering*, a five-minute update on their city played before council meetings

▲ *DARE* graduations for eight Centerville schools

▲ Commercials and PSAs of city events for local network TV spots

▲ Beautification Award-winning homes from Oakwood in a musical montage

▲ *Trail of Hope*, about Springboro's involvement in the underground railroad movement

▲ *State of the City* addresses from any mayor who requests one

▲ *The Christmas lights of Miamisburg*, a winter decoration program

▲ *On Patrol in Germantown*, working with police to look at public safety issues in the village.

We provide coverage of annual events like band competitions, festivals and parades. MVCC staff also produces programming to meet the interest of all cities, such as coverage of county commission meetings and regional planning meetings, and *Meet the Candidates* election programming co-produced with the Greater Dayton League of Women Voters.

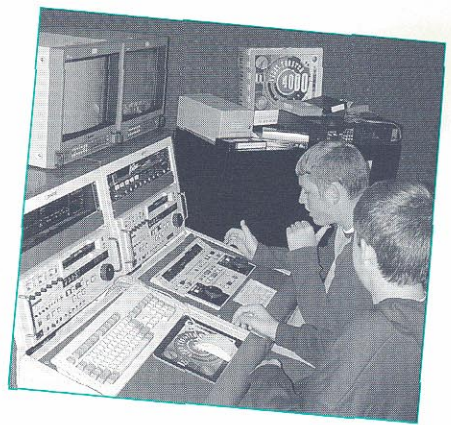
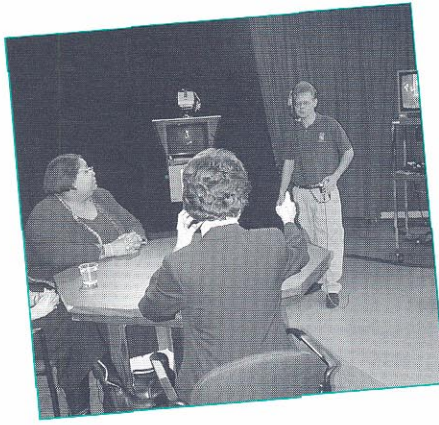
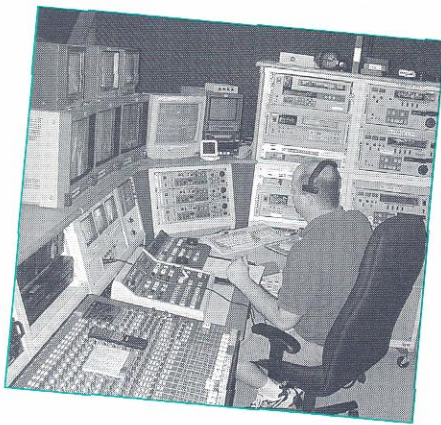
Although our priority is producing programs for cablecast, we still do a variety of videos used solely for "in-house" purposes and not shown on the cable channels. A most recent example is an employee orientation video for the Yankee Trace Golf Course in Centerville, Ohio. It received an award of excellence from the *All Ohio Video/Multimedia Festival* hosted by ITVA and Northcoast.

To offer such a variety of programs, MVCC government producers work closely with and train the clients from each city on scripting, pre-production, and the level of involvement their envisioned video will take. This allows the client to decide the amount of detail a program will have, and to understand the trade-offs involved. To offer our cities more options for making video, over the past two years we began installing robotic controlled camera production systems in our eight cities' council chambers.

The pooling of franchise fees to fund access video gives our residents much better equipment and training than eight small, independent centers could. In addition to being able to afford an Avid or Betacam, we have a 1600 square foot television studio with a Newtek Flyer, second Toaster, and chromakey wall. There are three SVHS editing systems and an array of portable equipment for educational and public usage. We are phasing in DVC Pro equipment in every aspect of our educational and public access services later this year. In addition, we have a wide range of classes and workshops for volunteers, and two staff dedicated to their productions.

Our government functions. Part of what makes MVCC intriguing is that only half of the budget is allocated to video services. A staff of four full-time and four part-time employees (and several consultants) are employed in providing non-cable-related services, including:





MVCC Production Tech Mike Cornet works in the studio control room in the photo at left. Center, MVCC Production Tech Dan Downard floor directs a studio taping. Centerville High School students learn to edit a school project in the photo at right.

▲ **Cable Regulatory Services:** providing legal services and staff to perform franchise regulatory functions. MVCC handles franchise renewals, responds to consumer complaints, communicates with the FCC annually, and stays apprised of litigation/legislation that may affect our cable franchise powers.

▲ **Internet Services:** Our graphic designer creates web sites for MVCC and each member city. By working closely with a city representative and providing Internet software, we train them to maintain their own home pages and to develop this vital information resource (see www.mvcc.net).

▲ **Municipal Training Academy (MTA):** MTA offers courses for elected officials and policy makers on topics such as ethics and public records. MTA offers free or low-cost training for city employees on topics such as supervision and customer service, as well as a broad range of other relevant topics such as regulatory compliance for state and federal mandates like OSHA.

▲ **Tactical Crime Suppression Unit (TCSU):** Police Chiefs from each city meet to coordinate all kinds of police activities. TCSU has subcommittees on training, supervision, and criminal intelligence, and supports an Organized Crime Task Force in cooperation with the Ohio Attorney General and other local, state and federal law enforcement agencies in the area.

▲ **Alliance of Public Service Officials:** Public Works Directors meet to share information and work on cooperative projects. Past projects include seeking joint bids for pavement marking.

▲ **Data Processing Managers:** Staff from each city meets to create uniform standards for computers, software and networks. This group is developing plans for the fiber optic communications network being built by Time Warner to ensure we get optimum use from the system when completed.

History of Information Technologies. MVCC has a long history of applying information technologies in the service of local government. In 1978 we initiated an email system "Gov Comm" which linked all eight city managers literally at their desktops. Starting in 1990 we began operation of a public bulletin board system (BBS) to provide "24-Hour City Access." This system averaged 1,106 calls per month over its operational life. (It was retired in June 1999.) From its beginning, this service provided a text-only version of a "home page" for each member city, listing city officials, city services and supporting messages from residents to city officials and department. In 1996 we added software which provided residents free access to Internet email. In 1992 we became the sixth access center to launch an interactive service

using the Response Television System running on two Amiga computers. "Quest Television" was advertised as a way for the cable subscriber to "tell your TV what to do."

Viewers could dial in and access one of the 2,500 pages of graphics our staff created. Viewers could use services such as a sign language tutorial, an art gallery featuring the work of local artists, play one of twelve different games, or view city information pages which provided useful information residents might need to know about city services. At its peak, usage ranged from 1,500 to 3,000 calls a week from cable subscribers.

Recently our efforts have been aimed towards linking each city's police department through laptop computers in each police car tied together by digital cell modems and a secure technology referred to as cellular digital packet data. In 1997, the cable council authorized expending up to \$270,000 to install three laptop computers in police cars for each member city. This computerized police project connects officers in the field directly with several criminal intelligence databases. It also provides a direct communications link among all eight cities, and can be expanded to work with computer-aided-dispatch (using global positioning satellites) and perform report writing and records functions. The results are safer communities, enhanced officer safety, more arrests, and greater productivity by police.

We have nearly reached the halfway mark towards completing a fiber optic I-Net linking all eight cities. Time Warner is building the system for us as a franchise obligation. To date the I-Net is activated in four of the eight cities with the others planned in the next 18 months. When this system is complete, the network will serve as the backbone of a metropolitan-wide information network connecting all our cities with fiber. This system will be used for data processing, telemetry and meter reading, two-way audio/video communication for distance learning and teleconference delivery to each city from one of the four satellite dishes installed at our location.

The methods of accessing information are changing and so is the technology that provides it. The structure of MVCC gives us the flexibility to meet these changes, to reduce costs and increase value for our member residents.

The Miami Valley Cable Council proves that when cities cooperate, everyone benefits.

Richard Diaz is a government producer and Ric Hayes is director of cable operations at Miami Valley Cable Council. Contact them at rdiaz@mvcc.net or rhayes@mvcc.net

by Tom Bryson

In the years since cable franchises across the country first began to provide for broadcast of city council meetings, little has changed. The sometimes controversial, but usually routine world of municipal government councils has been aired live and/or taped for rebroadcast week in and week out.

However, the nature of the information explosion at the turn of the 21st century has made a paradigm shift in municipal communications a real prospect for cities of all sizes. Many cities have (or have access to) emerging technologies and are beginning to use it.

And so it goes in Farmers Branch, Texas. A northern suburb of Dallas, the historically-rich city of Farmers Branch boasts a modest resident population of about 26,000, but a daytime business citizenry of nearly 100,000. And, like other cities, council meetings have been broadcast live and on tape on local cable television for years with very little change in the nature of the message.

Then in early 1999, Mayor Bob Phelps and City Manager Richard Escalante approached the city's internal Communications Division with an idea to use the in house video facilities to streamline the formal council meeting while enhancing cable television council meeting coverage.

Regular council meetings are scheduled every first and third Monday of the month at 7:30 p.m. The consent agenda, that is consideration items that may not need individual discussion, were generally read individually then approved with a single motion. Those items, plus the city manager's report, usually entailed about one quarter to one third of the whole agenda. The mayor and city manager's proposal involved detailing the full explanation of consent agenda items as well as the city manager's report in a program to air at 7 p.m. on local cable, a half hour prior to the start of the regular meeting and taped for replay prior to council rebroadcasts.

After some trial runs, the production values for the show were finalized and *City Council Tonight* went on the air in May of 1999. The format loosely follows that of a news program and originates from the FBTV (Farmers Branch Television) Channel 16 studios upstairs at city hall. The process begins early in the day as consent agenda items and explanation text is downloaded into Microsoft Word then written into the body of the script. The *City Manager's Report* is also formulated from departmental submissions and current events, the inserted into the script after city manager approval.

In the late morning, graphics are finalized, consisting primarily of consent agenda titles over still photos of the city council in action. These "slides," plus any other information that may per-

ON THE AIR

COUNCIL WARM UP SHOW ENHANCES GOVERNMENT ACCESS AS MORE THAN 'THE MEETING CHANNEL'



tain to items or reports, are inserted into the broadcast at marked locations. Other graphics include a "lower third" identification of the anchor, how to contact City Hall information as well as any special event or holiday closing information.

Technical rehearsal usually begins about 1 p.m. and involves the anchor, producer/director and teleprompter operator. The anchorperson sits at the news desk in front of a light-

friendly background and reads the teleprompter while the producer/director facilitates the graphics and PSA breaks. The traditional format is for the anchor to introduce the program and cover the consent agenda in the first segment. Local and/or canned public service announcements are inserted for the first (and usually only) commercial break. Segment two covers the *City*

Manager's Report and any other scheduling or event information.

Depending on the length of the consent agenda, *City Council Tonight* can equally vary. In the first year, the shortest show covered six consent items and took about 12 minutes. The most lengthy program entailed 20 consent items and lasted a full 29 minutes, segueing directly into the regular meeting coverage. Although the show aired live for its first six months, communications officials opted to begin taping it in the mid-afternoon with alterations later in the day as necessary.

The only variable that can cause alterations to the script or the show revolves around the council study session that begins at about 4:30 p.m. At that time, when discussing all agenda items, council members may opt to move any item from the regular agenda to the consent agenda or vice versa. In the event that one or more items are moved to the consent agenda, those items and their explanations are written into the show script. In the case of those alterations, which happens frequently, the second segment is re-shot prior to air time, including the new agenda items and the *City Manager's Report* as previously stated.

In the regular meeting, Mayor Phelps informs the audience in the chambers and on TV that full explanation of the consent agenda is aired at 7 p.m. every council Monday as well as prior to council replays. He then calls for a single motion to approve all consent items. If anyone comes to city hall for items on the consent agenda, *City Council Tonight* is aired on the television in the city hall lobby as well as on the big screen in the council chambers. The end result of *City Council Tonight* has been to state the routine background on the show, while streamlining the formal council meeting and allowing more time to discuss detailed items.

Tom Bryson is director of communications, city of Farmers Branch, Texas. For more information on *City Council Tonight* or the *Farmers Branch Council* broadcast, please contact the Communications Division at 972.919.2632 or email FBTV@ci.farmers-branch.tx.us

JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW...

For those of you who are just starting a government access channel, or thinking about starting a government access channel, there is a new website that will be of great help to you. www.gatvinstitute.org, launched in April 2000 is a web site that has articles, resources, equipment budgets, sample forms and more for government access channel managers. This site is a project of FrameRate Corporation in cooperation with SCAN NATOA, the Southern California and Nevada Chapter of the National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors. Topics include policies, equipment, management structure, staffing, marketing and more. The web site offers practical advice and a discussion of the issues and options available.

TEAMING GOVERNMENT ACCESS WITH PUBLIC SAFETY

by Joseph C. Keefe

Coral Gables, Florida, is a city of approximately 45,000 residents located along Miami's southwestern border. Founded in 1926 by George Merrick, the City Beautiful features Mediterranean architecture, fountains and elaborate entrances. The city is fifteen miles long, and two miles wide at its widest point.

CGTV (Coral Gables TV) is the cable television division of the city manager's office, providing 24-hour programming to residents subscribing to MediaOne cable service. The government access station provides a blend of information, entertainment and culture that has resulted in positive responses from our citizens and visitors.

The Cable TV Division offices are located in the public safety building, and consist of an administrative office, two edit suites (one linear, one non-linear), and a field equipment ready room for electronic news gathering (ENG) and field production. We also have a remote production trailer, to be replaced in late June by a new six-camera remote truck for commission remotes, the annual *Fourth of July Concert and Fireworks Show*, and the *Junior Orange Bowl Parade*, which we originate for CGTV and other area stations. This new vehicle will utilize its wireless camera and 30-foot mast-cam to provide support for both police and fire departments during emergency operations.

Arrangements are currently being developed which will let us transmit live or taped video from the truck to the emergency operations center in the public safety building during hazmat, disaster, hostage, or major fire situations. A new commission chamber system will feature a five-camera remote system, SVHS/DVCPRO capability, and integrated PowerPoint, slide, and document camera capability. The new system is also slated for completion in late June and will enable ongoing live coverage of city commission meetings, elections, and other functions in city hall.

Other public safety programming regularly provided includes *Police Talk*, our potted palm talk show, featuring interviews dealing with crime prevention, innovative

police programs, our citizen's mobile patrol, and dozens of other subjects. Additional programs have included *Street Beat*,



We are on call 24-hours a day for both police and fire, providing documentation upon request for serious traffic accidents and fire investigations, as well as keying a new campaign for manatee safety in partnership with a number of state, county, federal and private agencies.

an occasional show shot in the field to explain things like how to protect yourself during holiday shopping, or how to drive through some of the new traffic calming devices, such as roundabouts and traffic circles. The *Ticket of the Month Club* found us partnered with the motor unit, documenting a specific

traffic offense with

increased enforcement and video coverage with the goal of reducing traffic accidents from a given cause at a specific intersection

(perhaps illegal turns, or failure to clear

an intersection). BOLO asks

residents to *Be On The Lookout* for subjects being sought by the Coral Gables Police Department or other agencies.

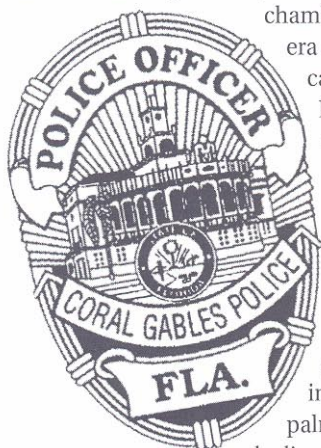
Other regular coverage includes live and/or taped documentation of the *Police/Fire Open House*, as well as *Police Memorial Day Ceremonies*. *Firehouse Chat* regularly provides fire safety tips

and information on new programs available to our residents, such as free home safety inspections, and smoke detector battery giveaways every time clocks change for Daylight Saving Time. Our residents are in better shape with *Firehouse Fitness Tips*, during which a firefighter who is also a fitness instructor demonstrates some basic fitness tips for viewers. CGTV provided our fire department wall-to-wall coverage of the 1999 *International Extrication Competition*, covering every event and all competition during the five day conference at the city-owned Biltmore Hotel.

We are on call 24-hours a day for both police and fire, providing documentation upon request for serious traffic accidents and fire investigations, as well as keying a new campaign for manatee safety in partnership with a number of state, county, federal and private agencies.

CGTV is involved, both in government and our community. We take pride in being a part of the City Beautiful, and in bringing it to the world. Stay tuned for video on the 'Net - next on the agenda! Basic information is now available at www.coralgables.net. Anyone with questions is welcome to call (305) 460-5521, Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Joseph C. Keefe is video production manager for the city of Coral Gables, Florida. Contact him at 305.460.5520.



BALLOT MEASURES & CANDIDATES

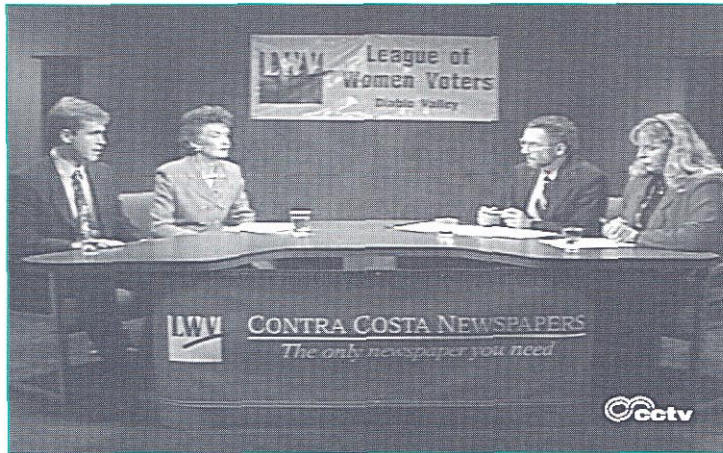
INFORMING VOTERS THROUGH A COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

by Shannon O'Connor

Contra Costa Television (CCTV), the government and educational access station of Contra Costa County, California strives to create informed voters by co-producing the League of Women Voters Election Forums. Created in collaboration with the League of Women Voters, AT&T Cable Services, the Contra Costa County Clerk-Recorders Office and Contra Costa Newspapers, the debate forums ensure that voters of our community are provided with factual and unbiased information in order to enable them to make informed decisions about electoral issues that will greatly impact their lives.

There are two forums, one for ballot measures and one for candidates, both moderated by Contra Costa Newspapers' Political Editor Dan Borenstein. The first forum, for ballot measures, features expert panelists educating citizens about the pros and cons of the measures and other issues of public concern. The ballot measure forums are occasionally on a selected number of measures due to the volume on the ballot. They are selected with input from Borenstein. The second format features candidates for political office presenting their views and qualifications to voters. These programs are a great opportunity for the discussion of public matters and current questions.

A purpose of the election forums is to increase public awareness of the political process. Gwen Watson, president of the Diablo Valley Chapter of the League of Women Voters states, "The forums are to educate voters so they are well informed on both sides of issues and to give candidates a chance to air their views." They are a great public service and provide a vital source of information to the voters. The forums encourage voter participation and influence public policy through education and advocacy. Government, educational and public access stations are great resources to utilize in order to increase public awareness of the political process. "The county sponsorship of community



forums are an excellent way to disseminate information to the general public in a democratic society," states CCTV Programming Coordinator John Young.

Many citizens use voter pamphlets as their primary source of information when determining their political position on candidates and issues. The forums are another credible and reliable source of information. People trust the League of Women Voters to be non-partisan, fair and neutral. In addition, the election forums bring realism to the election process that the voter pamphlets can't replicate. The debates personalize the election process by letting citizens see and hear the candidates and issues first hand from the comfort of their own home.

Producing the forums in collaboration with the League of Women Voters has resulted in obtaining key players in the electoral process to speak on state ballot measures. In the forum on Proposition 28, the measure to repeal the additional \$0.50 per pack tax enacted by Proposition 10, speaking as the proponent was Ned Roscoe from Cigarettes Cheaper who actually signed the measure. In opposition was a top member from the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), Zoe Ann Murray, who signed against the measure. The participation of these major players is possible because they trust the League of Women Voters election forums to be factual and unbiased.

The forums are truly a cooperative

effort. This collaborative effort helps to heighten awareness of the elections and make every member of the partnership more visible to the public. The partnership includes Contra Costa Television, the League of Women Voters, AT&T Cable Services, the Contra Costa County Clerk-Recorders Office and Contra Costa Newspapers. CCTV airs important voter information on our interactive bulletin board called *CountyNet*

Interactive, and Contra Costa Newspapers feature ads and stories. Voters can check out the playback schedule for the forums and other election information on line at www.co.contra-costa.ca.us/depart/ccctv, www.hotcoco.com and www.smartvoter.org. All collateral materi-

al supporting the elections recognizes all of the sponsors. Collateral material from our experience has included newspaper ads or articles, the production itself, show promos, community bulletin boards and websites. The parties involved try to help each

other. CCTV has experienced increased visibility as a result of airing the election forums.

These candidate and issue forums are televised on CCTV as well as public access facilities in the Bay Area in an attempt to reach as many voters as possible. Government and educational access stations have a broader viewership base than the League itself. CCTV has a potential viewership of 308,000 households countywide.

The poorer population is often under-represented in voting. Since the forums are accessible to anyone who has basic cable, they encourage everyone to vote for vital benefits that they may otherwise lose by the absence of their vote. Partnered with the *Contra Costa Times* newspaper, which has a daily circulation of 105,000 and a weekend circulation of 210,000, we are a great force to create an informed electorate. The questions asked during the forums are generated directly by local reporters who have been cover-



ing the specifics of the issue. They have been researching and reporting on these propositions on a daily basis and know the ballot measures in detail. Other questions are pooled from readers of the *Contra Costa Times* and friends of the League of Women Voters through the use of email and mail sent to the *Contra Costa Times*.

The main concern when attempting to meet the needs of every member in the partnership is a difference in operating policies. As a public service of the Contra Costa Board of Supervisors, CCTV must invite all candidates or sides to participate. The League of Women Voters, however, has a rule that for the general election candidates participating in the forums should meet a five percent threshold, i.e., they or their party must have received five percent of the vote in the last primary, or the party's registration in the district must be at least five percent of the registered voters. Contra Costa Newspapers also want the 5 percent rule, however a policy change would require the approval of the board of supervisors. Since the forums are aired on CCTV we are required to give all candidates equal time and the League agreed to help us meet this goal.

This is our fifth year participating in this collaborative project and we have been approached to take part in producing and airing city council forums as well. However, in accordance with CCTV policies and procedures, CCTV only cablecasts programs of countywide interest or concern. Contra Costa County is com-

posed of 19 different cities and the city council meetings do not have a broad enough base to constitute interest on a countywide level. For efficiency, CCTV produces the city council forums and the community access stations air them.

A concern that has been voiced by the public in the past is that they would like the debates to be held during meetings in the neighborhoods of the surrounding communities. When this was done in the past, the League of Women Voters found that attendance was poor and the quality of the program couldn't compare with the high quality of an in-studio production. Since we are televising the election forums on CCTV and other community access facilities, we want the quality to be as good as possible so that viewers will be more inclined to watch the programs. People will enjoy and give more credibility to a program that has superior sound and picture quality.

The League of Women Voters Election Forums are a great way to present sound and balanced educational programs about electoral issues and the candidates while creating important partnerships in your community. CCTV urges you to consider using this type of forum to create positive media awareness of the election process by utilizing the public, government and educational access stations in your community. For more information about this process contact Patricia Burke at 925.313.1183 or email questions to pburk@cctv.co.contra-costa.ca.us.

Shannon O'Connor is administrative analyst for Contra Costa Television (CCTV)

AUSTIN MUSIC NETWORK

continued from page 16

programming and concerts that were wildly popular with the viewing audiences. The unique channel has always been moving through uncharted territory. Now housed in Threadgill's Restaurant, the place where Janis Joplin began her singing career, AMN looks ahead.

What does the future hold for America's only all-music community channel?

The city of Austin has a substantial investment in the vast music outlet that often serves as a resource for national and international venues such as, MTV, BBC, VH1, TNT, CMT among others. The AMN Archive houses the largest collection of footage featuring Texas' artists in the world—over 20,000 music video tapes of Texas' and Austin's best known musical works. The city's video archivist catalogs the videos from AMN productions, independent producers, record companies, and musicians. The library of original footage, with both local unsigned artists and national and international talent, expands daily without compromising the mission to promote local and regional music as an economic development tool for Austin's music industry. Archive material is available for play on AMN and for limited use by the media and commercial production houses.

Funding issues continue to plague the music operation. Should the channel be funded in part from city coffers? As a true access channel? Should total self-sufficiency be the goal? Who independently could fund such an endeavor? What can the city reasonably expect from underwriters and sponsorships similar to a PBS model? If the channel becomes totally commercial, what then are its chances of success? According to Hamblin, the Internet may well prove to be a major factor in developing some independent funding for AMN, where archives provide a motherlode of totally unique material for video streaming. All seem to agree that AMN is a city of Austin community service option worth keeping afloat and available to the world.

Tim Hamblin provided some of the original inspiration for the Austin Music Network. He works as the city's video archivist. Contact Tim to get the technical requirements for tape submission by telephone 512.499.1801 or at tim.hamblin@ci.austin.tx.us

ADVICE TO OTHER FACILITIES WANTING TO DO SIMILAR FORUMS:

1. Establish election forum policies.
2. Form partnerships to increase awareness for the candidates and spread the workload.
3. Decide on forums to tape.
4. Prepare a distribution list available for other community access stations to request what tape format they want and quantity needed for airing.
5. Establish cablecasting schedule(s).
6. Have a hard copy of the broadcast channels, dates and times of all the cable systems available to the media and candidates on location on the date that the forums are taped.
7. Have duplication request forms available for the candidates with the appropriate cost and timeframe.
8. Set aside a room for the media.
9. Prepare the studio for guests.
10. Utilize community access bulletin boards to announce important election information, such as the last date to register to vote and promote playback dates, or at least where to find the schedule.
11. Produce other videos to encourage voter participation in partnership with the election forums.

Austin, Tx

'LIVE MUSIC CAPITAL OF THE WORLD'

HOME OF THE UNIQUE AUSTIN MUSIC NETWORK CABLE CHANNEL

by Patricia Garlinghouse

Austin's music channel, known as the 'Austin Music Network' or AMN, is a cable channel owned by the city to stimulate the development of the local music industry and to promote Austin music and musicians. The channel was created by the Austin City Council as a nonprofit, economic development project for distribution on Time Warner Entertainment Company's cable system through a cable franchise agreement. Since the channel has the status, legally, of a 'community programming need,' certain cable regulatory restrictions arise. AMN is not an access channel, per se, and commercial advertising for support is allowed. The exception was put in place to enable the Austin Music Network to achieve funding independently of the city budget.

The day to day management of AMN is now under the Music Management Company with Rick Melchior as general manager. Although everyone agrees that AMN is a great idea, the channel has ongoing financial struggles. Asked why, Rick replies, "Because it IS so unique! It's neither fish nor fowl. It's not an access channel, but it's also not a conventional commercial television station. It's unusual in that it is a locally produced, commercially-supported channel." The contractor has the exclusive right to sell ads and to program and promote the channel; the city continues to create policy and control the channel's music archives.

The Austin Music Network Mission. AMN provides the best available music programming from local, national, and international sources, with its main focus and 80 percent of its channel space devoted to Austin and Texas musicians. AMN plays music videos, live performance footage (shot on location and in the studio), and long-form programming, including archival and historic material, using all musical styles and genres. "We want to turn the world onto Texas Music," says City Video Archivist Tim Hamblin.

A History in the Making. Tim Hamblin and several other independent video producers in 1989 brought the vision of an access channel devoted only to music to the attention of council member Max Nofziger who championed the cause until AMN became a reality. Hamblin says, "A cable channel dedicated to promoting regional music seems like the obvious development in a city acknowledged as having one of the most progressive access communities in the country, and claiming the title of "Live Music Capital of the World." Obtaining one of the cable company's channels, however, proved to be a challenge.



AMN Archivist Tim Hamblin, left, and AMN General Manager Rick Melchior, far right, with Willie Nelson.

By the fall of 1993, Time Warner (then Austin CableVision) offered a slot of four hours daily (from 10:00 pm to 2:00 am) to AMN on the Country Music Channel. The first music videos went on the air April 1, 1994. In the summer of 1995, the council requested a full access channel from Austin CableVision. By June 1996, local music programming was on the air 82 hours a week; during the remaining hours, AMN played CDs by Texas artists and aired an interactive bulletin board with information about local music venues and the AMN program schedule. On August 18, 1996, AMN graduated to a full 24 hours a day.

In the summer of 1998, the city council privatized the management of the Austin Music Network in hopes of generating revenues outside of the city's general fund. Despite humble beginnings and continued 'bare bones' operations, AMN enjoys legions of fans. In Tim Hamblin's words, "I can't think of any other city in the world, with such community pride in their local music scene, that could support a cable channel devoted to promoting the local music industry. That's why Austin is such a unique place!"

Since its inception in 1994, AMN has taped around one thousand local acts; produced shows that feature every style of Texas music from *Asleep At The Wheel* to *ZZ Top*; and taped dozens of national and international artists that have passed through the city, among them, Johnny Cash, Tony Bennett, Tito Puente, Nick Lowe, Hanson, Carl Perkins and Sandra Bernhard. These shows have resulted in hundreds of hours of live performance and interview footage that span every genre of music: folk, gospel, tejano, alternative, country, rap, classical, industrial, jazz, electronica, soul, world, pop, Latin, and blues.

In September 1994, AMN produced their first (C-Band) satellite broadcast that covered the *Armadillo World Headquarters Reunion* 'live' from the shores of Austin's Town Lake. The three-day concert featured a wealth of internationally known talent, including *The New Riders Of the Purple Sage*, Maria Maldaur and Dough Sahn. The first day's programming as a commercially-supported channel featured an extraordinary array of performers in a 24-hour live music marathon! The list was a virtual "Who's Who" of Austin and Texas artists—Kinky Freidman, Robert Earl Keen, Joe Ely, Flaco Jimenez, Lyle Lovett and Lucinda Williams.

In October 1999, AMN introduced *Willie Week*. The famed Texas icon provided AMN with many 'Willie TV' projects, special

Austin, TX

CITY TV ON THE WEB

CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS LIVE ON-LINE IN SANTA MONICA

by Keith A. Kurtz & Roslyn Wythe

So, somebody thinks that your municipal television broadcast ought to be on the web.

Once you get past your initial reaction (how are we ever going to do that?), you will probably be thinking about why this service is considered valuable.

After all, how many people in town can there be who have access to the World Wide Web, do not have cable television, and want to watch your channel? We were thinking just that when two citizens sent unsolicited email asking if we broadcast CityTV on the Internet. Both explained that they did not subscribe to cable TV but would like to watch the city council meetings without having to come to city hall (council meetings have long been broadcast on the local college radio station, KCRW). Okay. Point taken. There is demand.

There are, of course, two important groups that do not normally see the cable broadcast. First is anyone who is outside of the City during a Council meeting. This includes interested parties not based in the city, residents traveling that day, and staff who live outside the city. The second group is staff who need to be present for only a portion of the meeting. With the meeting broadcast available on their desktops, these busy people can easily work in their offices until needed in the council chamber.

Getting Started. Having decided to move forward, we looked for other cities already offering this service. Nearby Torrance, California is broadcasting full time on the web. Two telephone calls put us in touch with the staffer who set up the server and maintains the service. Torrance, we learned, is running the RealNetworks server on an Intel-based computer serving an audio stream optimized for modem users. In simpler terms, they are using a computer similar to the PCs on staff desktops, only more powerful. They purchased software from RealNetworks and chose to provide a signal best suited to users dialing into their Internet Service Provider (ISP) using a modem.

There are two leading software products that will capture an audio/video signal and "stream" it to the Internet, RealNetworks RealSystem G2 and Microsoft Netshow. The RealNetworks product has a number of technical advantages while the Microsoft software is free. Both require that the user download and install a free "plug-in" on their own computer. Note that since RealNetworks has most of the streaming media market share, it is more likely that users will have already installed the RealNetworks software. The RealNetworks basic server, G2, bundled with Real Producer Pro, is sold on a tiered pricing system depending upon how many streams, or simultaneous users, are required. When we investigated, we learned that the RealNetworks product was free for up to 25 streams, moderately priced for up to 40 streams, and relatively expensive beyond that.

Why pay RealNetworks for software that Microsoft is giving away? RealNetworks technology provides a more efficient and straightforward method for simultaneously broadcasting different quality streams without adding significant administrative effort. This makes it possible to offer streams optimized for both modem and network users with virtually no additional system resources



or complexity. Despite the availability of ISDN, cable modems and DSL, most home users are still accessing the Internet using a modem. Many business users and almost everyone in Santa Monica city government have high speed network access to the Internet. The RealNetworks server will actually transmit more data, which provides a better quality picture, on a network optimized stream.

The RealNetworks Server also has the ability to adjust its signal based on network load for each stream. That is, when things get congested, there is a fancy compression that occurs and a slightly degraded signal is transmitted that can wend its way through a crowded network more easily. This is similar to pulling a motorcycle out of your trunk when traffic backs up on the freeway. You can't carry as much stuff, but you don't get slowed down either. Not slowing down is very important during a live broadcast. For all of the above reasons, we elected to purchase the RealNetworks Server with a 40-stream license.

Nuts & Bolts. RealNetworks recommends that two servers be used, especially if multiple optimizations will be employed. One server needs to be connected directly to the television signal and is used to "capture," or encode the signal into a digital format. The second server is used to stream the signal onto the Internet. While this can all be done with one server, using two computers helps spread the load and assure that there are no service interruptions when usage gets heavy.

Consistent with Santa Monica city policy, we solicited bids for and purchased two Hewlett-Packard servers. Anticipating future growth, both are dual processor capable but contain only one CPU. Both came network ready and generously equipped with RAM and disk storage. The more RAM, the better for video processing!

For the web server, we chose a HP LPR NetServer equipped with the Windows NT operating system and the Microsoft IIS Web Server. The video capture server is the lower cost HP Kayak multimedia workstation. The Kayak comes with an audio capture circuit similar to a Sound Blaster, but we had to purchase a video capture card. RealNetworks recommends some specific video cards, the best of which we thought was the Wavetech TV-PCI product. Unfortunately, the Kayak's extensive multimedia capabilities used up all of the interrupt request (IRQ) choices available on the Wavetech card. After three days of trying, we reluctantly decided to try a different card. The Matrox Rainbow Runner video capture card connects directly to the computer's video display card and is working well. We discovered the hard way that it was necessary to disable the Kayak's video power saving mode that automatically shut down our broadcast after 15 minutes. Another complication was that we had to replace Windows NT with Windows 98 on the Kayak to accommodate the video capture card.

We purchased a rack mounted VCR and 13-inch television monitor along with all of the cables needed to connect everything. Century Communications, the local cable franchise, dropped a line into our computer room. We connect the feed from Century directly to the VCR where the signal is split into audio and video. These,

WORLD WEBCASTING

ACCESS FINALLY GETS SOME RESPECT

by Michael White

Recognition of PEG access television by mainstream print and broadcast media has been perennially relegated to the sort of, "...and on the lighter side of local TV" or "...local station rots minds of innocent children." This variety of dismissive "slam" coverage has kept access television on the ropes and on the defensive for nearly three decades. This can make the under-appreciated folks who actually work in access television feel a bit like the misunderstood, tie-tugging, pop-eyed comic Rodney Dangerfield, who, "...don't get no respect." In August of 1999, all of that changed for CATS (Community Access Television Services of Bloomington, Indiana), as press accolades rolled in for our newly initiated webcasting and meeting archive service at: catstv.net.

I think the first time the true power of our webcasting service hit me was when I was vacationing in Hawaii. My elderly parents gathered around the family computer and me, probably not too unlike the way folks used to gather around the tube-warmed radio hearth of their Atwater-Kent. I launched Netscape, typed in catstv.net, and "presto", there was the Bloomington Telecommunications Council, live on the web. And though the picture was small, with a frame rate that reduced the occasional gestures of the council to a jerky, approximation of cinematic fluidity only aficionados of Edison's kintoscopic running horse could love: there it was. I could clearly make out the chair of the council sneaking sips of a diet 7UP, as he and others were putting probing questions to my visibly uncomfortable replacement at the meeting.

Of course these technologically implausible proceedings, with participants evoking my name (albeit in my absence) impressed the heck out of my creaky old parents. I then showed them the comprehensive archive portion of catstv.net, and a digital version of their own flesh and blood (me), speaking before a recent meeting of the Bloomington City Council. And perhaps there's no connection but...a week later they finally agreed to loan me a down payment for my first house. Coincidence? I think not.

Okay, now for the straight poop about this service: CATS was established as a PEG Access provider in April of 1974. Since then, it has operated as a department of the Monroe County Public Library, which, in conjunction with the city of Bloomington and HoosierNet (a nonprofit internet service provider also located within the library), formed a technical partnership to initiate the webcasting service. The city, HoosierNet, and the library chipped in the necessary \$15,000 to cover start-up expenses (software, hardware and labor) and we were off and running with what appeared to be the world's first governmental webstreaming and meeting archive service.

Here's how it works: Technically, CATS sends a standard 330 MHz cable to our friends at HoosierNet, who run our signal through a video capture card of a 400-MHz Dell PowerEdge 2300

running Red Hat Linux 6.1 (from Red Hat Inc. of Durham, NC). The RealProducer Plus suite from

RealNetworks streams the video through

RealPlayer's freeware. If this big, dry, technical mouthful gags in your throat like a circus weenie, fear not. I guarantee you there are folks on your staff right now who can decipher this. Failing that, you can retain the services of a hired computer-gun, who'll make all of this look like child's play.

Of course the real power (and pleasure) of webcasting lies in its archiving capabilities. This allows concerned citizens or board members who may not be able to attend meetings, to view them on demand: any time and from anywhere in the world, irrespective of what cable system to which they may happen to subscribe.

Currently the site at catstv.net archives approximately 60 meetings at a time (about three month's worth of local governmental meetings). Typical offerings include the Bloomington Common Council, Monroe County Public Library Board, and episodes of *Bloomington At Work*, a public affairs program dedicated to

explaining the workings of city government. As new meetings are archived, the oldest are bumped from the server, but maintained in the permanent collection of CATS. Matt Pierce, a former city council member (and current chief of staff to US Congressman Baron Hill), has come to rely on the service. Pierce says, "This is great. I'm now able to watch Bloomington Common Council meetings from here in the nation's capital."

Our friends at HoosierNet (www.stream.hoosier.net/cats), report that since September 1999, the system logs detail 5,864 viewings of the free webcast coverage, which averages out to around 310 viewings per week. Of that number, 21 percent have been viewing live meeting webcasts. Interestingly, the majority, 79 percent, were tuned-in to watch archived meetings. And that's another thing: how many times have you wanted to know the numbers behind your viewership? With the software that runs the system, it's easy to maintain accurate logs detailing the specifics of how the system is being used and what's being watched. Take that Arbitron.

Way back in 1927, when Philo T. Farnsworth transmitted the first true television signal with his "image dissector tube" (as it happens, a 60-line picture of a dollar sign), he could have barely conceived of the digital future to which he and his electron stream had just given birth. As PEG access jumps ship from the confines of its designated cable franchise sea and charts a digital course on unknown world broadband waters, who knows where this could lead. Spice from India anyone?

Michael White is executive director of Community Access Television Services (CATS) of Bloomington and Monroe County Indiana. For more information about system operation and media coverage, see links at: www.stream.hoosier.net/cats, or log onto CATS main page at www.catstv.net



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MARKETING GOVERNMENT ACCESS CHANNELS

NEVER A GREATER NEED WITH CHANNEL PROLIFERATION

by Robin Gee

As government access channels and facilities have matured and grown, we have become experts at dealing with the daily challenges that all of us face:

- ▲ lots of airtime to fill,
- ▲ modest resources to produce original programming,
- ▲ maintaining equipment and trying to stay state-of-the-art,
- ▲ small staff, and
- ▲ growing demand for our services.

Our next greatest challenge that needs to be addressed and worked on cooperatively is marketing our government access channels. The need to market our channels has never been greater. Rather than focusing inward and functioning as a part of government, our efforts need to go outward and focus on being a part of the media.

The Viewing Experience is Changing for Cable

Subscribers. Broadband technology is making all types of new services and programming opportunities available to cable viewers. Many of us have, or soon will have, digital channels available to our cable subscribers. With the expanded number of channels come smart remote control devices. Viewers will choose which programming to view based upon a menu driven system, instead of just randomly “surfing” for something to view. Here in Santa Monica, California, CityTV will go from becoming one of 80 channels to one of 140 channels. How will our viewers find us and our programming with these new smart remote controls?

Television viewing is also moving towards becoming a more personal viewing experience for the consumer. Products such as TiVo (www.tivo.com) and ReplayTV (www.replaytv.com) allow consumers to record programming onto a hard drive and have instant access to what they want to view. The press and consumers are raving about how these technologies have revolutionized TV viewing. A pause feature allows viewers to pause live programming to take a break and then return to unpause the box and not miss a second of the action. A simple “thumbs up” tells TiVo to record every episode of your favorite program without you having to tracking changing airtimes, days or back-to-back airings. Will viewers give a “thumbs up” to any programs on our government access channels because they know they want to view it at their leisure at a later date?

Other technology such as Diva (www.divatv.com) and Intertainer (www.intertainer.com) will bring video-on-demand to cable subscribers. Rather than go to a video store, subscribers will have instant access to the movie of their choice. And, television viewing is becoming more fun. Wink TV (www.wink.com) brings fun interactivity to television viewing.

So, while technology is working hard to create more programming choices, give viewers instant gratification, and make TV viewing a more interactive, fun experience, where does government access television fit into this mix? The media landscape is becoming increasingly cluttered. There will be more competition than ever for the viewer's attention. It will become harder for viewers to find us or learn about us. Others have big budgets to

get the eyeballs, we don't.

Change is all around us. The key to success is to do an effective job of marketing our government access channels now, while we still have an opportunity to make an impression on the cable viewer before all these new technologies and new programming services get fully implemented. We cannot ignore the changes that are going on around us. We need to think competitively

and have quality programming to compete for viewers. We must identify our niche and exploit it to the max.

The proposed strategy is to:

- ▲ Build a strong identity for your channel now,
- ▲ Satisfy a viewing need of your audience, and
- ▲ Become a part of a viewer's consideration set.

Branding Our Channels. People express themselves through their brand choices. Everything from the clothing we wear, cars we purchase, soda we drink, athletic shoes we wear, restaurants we eat at and vacations we take are an expression of who we are. I express the thrifty side of myself by buying my laundry detergent and panty hose at Wal-Mart. The extravagant side of myself is expressed through my MAC makeup and Giorgio Armani eyeglasses. Together, my unique choices of brands create a unique expression of who I am or who I think I am.

People's choice of TV channels to view is no different. They are an expression of who a person is. Who hasn't heard someone say, “I only watch PBS”? The person is trying to tell you something about him or herself with that statement. So, our community channels need to appeal emotionally to a viewer and be a reflection of their lifestyle.

Ask yourself and the staff for your channel the following questions: What is it about our channel that makes it unique from any other channel? Why would someone want to watch our channel, what need does it fulfill? What do we want people to feel about our channel, even if they just hear its name?

If someone chooses to watch our channel, what are they saying about their lifestyle that is reflected by that choice?

At CityTV, we determined that a CityTV viewer watches the channel because they care about the local community and local issues. They like to see people and places they know. They have a sense of belonging and history with our community. They like to have a feeling of neighborliness, and they like to know what is happening locally.

Once we determined these attributes, we looked at our programming line-up and evaluated whether each of our series fit into the brand we were trying to create for the channel. We kept most of our programming, eliminated two series and came up with ideas for two new shows that fit in with our brand personality.

Creating A Brand Identity. There are two main elements that go into creating a brand identity:

- ▲ Name
- ▲ Brand Personality

The first thing is to have a name. Don't just call your channel “Cable Channel 3”. And, as many of us who have faced having our channel number changed on us know, consider not putting your channel number into your name. Also, you don't necessarily need to come up with a new name for your channel. You should only



change the name if the channel and its personality are changing significantly in some way. Don't overlook the value of all of the brand recognition that you may already have from an older, existing name. It may be easier to just build upon it and refocus it, rather than start with a new name from scratch and have no name recognition or identity.

Your brand personality is just like people have a personality. Everyone has a different personality that is unique. So should your channel. The items that can help to make a brand personality include:

- ▲ On-air talent and personalities
- ▲ Series and regular shows ▲ On-air promos
- ▲ Memorable jingle or music for your channel ID
- ▲ Feature programming such as election coverage
- ▲ Community involvement

All of these items together make an impression on the viewer about the channel, its attitude and personality. Think about radio stations and how they differentiate themselves from one another. Their jingles, contests, disc jockeys and format combine together to create a personality for the station. We need to do the same for our government access channels and give them a personality that viewers are drawn to and can relate to.

Marketing to Build Brand Awareness. There are many elements that go into creating brand awareness. This includes:

- ▲ Audio logos ▲ Video logos
- ▲ Positioning/Repositioning Liners ▲ Image promos
- ▲ Episodic promos ▲ External Advertising

Audio logos are the way you identify your brand name with audio. Have one brand name and always say it the same way with the same inflection. An example would be "This is CNN."

Video logos must be distinctive and compelling. They must convey the look and feel of the brand's personality. They must clearly differentiate themselves from other logos in the marketplace.

Positioning/Repositioning liners support the brand personality and position the brand, not the product. The line should differentiate you and set you apart. Here are a few channels and their positioning/repositioning liners:

- ▲ A&E: *Escape the Ordinary*
- ▲ ESPN: *The Worldwide Leader in Sports*
- ▲ Fox Family Channel: *You Belong*
- ▲ Showtime: *No Limits*

Image promos focus on communicating the brand's personality and positive points of difference. These would be promos that just promote the overall channel. A good example would be the ABC Network's black and yellow campaign that is on billboards, bus benches and on TV. It tries to create an image for the network as a whole.

Episodic promos promote individual shows or personalities. You don't have to create a promo for every show on the channel. Just promote your key programs that illustrate your brand personality. For example, Showtime does not promote every program and movie. They concentrate their marketing efforts on the key original programs and events that showcase their "No Limits" campaign.

External advertising includes websites, banners, billboards, bus ads, bill stuffers, city newsletters, local papers, monitors in car washes, movie theater slides and more. Be creative in utilizing the many free or low cost resources you may already have available to you. These include having booths at community events, putting

articles in your city newsletter and getting mentions in the newsletters of local non-profit organizations you are featuring on your channel. And, consider trying to be a media sponsor of community events. Many of us are already covering and promoting events in our community. Ask the event organizers to give you media sponsorship credit and to use your logo on any promotion or advertising that goes out for the event. It will show your involvement in the community.

Try to get your local media to support you and you'll support them. We promote the newspapers and websites that provide our programming listings in their publications. They are happy to see their support regularly promoted on the channel. Also, think about having contests, giveaways, puzzles, etc. as part of your channel. Many commercial channels are rewarding their viewers, why shouldn't you? An easy way to start is to go to your local museum and ask for free passes. This way you are supporting your local museums and getting a giveaway for your channel at the same time. And, don't forget to talk to your local cable operator, they may wish to provide you with a free month of basic service as a prize which will be greatly appreciated by your viewers!!!

Exploit Your Niche. Government access channels play a valuable role in their communities. Just as technology is changing and evolving, so must government access channels.

Our challenge is to remain relevant and be a vital part of a viewer's TV diet so that as the world of TV viewing changes, we are always a part of that world.

Robin Gee is the cable TV manager for the City of Santa Monica. She is active in NATOA and is the current President of the Southern California and Nevada Chapter of NATOA. Contact her at Robin-Gee@ci.santa-monica.ca.us

ON THE WEB

continued from page 17

in turn, are run to the Kayak for capture. The Kayak puts the digitized stream onto our LAN where it is accessed by the LPR Server and streamed onto the Internet. A composite RF line is run from the antenna output of the VCR to the television to monitor the signal. All equipment is mounted in a 19-inch rack with a shared computer monitor and keyboard.

Operation. We are enough concerned about the load on our network that we are "netcasting" only during city council meetings. The video stream requires considerable network capacity and we felt it necessary to restrict use to the evening hours when internal network usage is at a minimum. Note that Torrance is running their netcast full time with no reported problems.

Still, we opted for the more conservative approach. We expect to be able to netcast CityTV full time once a planned network upgrade is completed. The service is publicized both on CityTV and in city publications. Our development efforts are presently focused on developing programmable controls for the netcast as well as improving the size and quality of the video broadcast.

Today, nobody asks why we should offer this service. Rather, the public and staff are clamoring for service enhancements. This, we think, is the mark of a successful program. We are reaching an appreciative and attentive audience beyond the city limits. The city of Santa Monica's netcast has proved itself an integral element in the electronic delivery of electronic services and information.

Contact the authors at keith-kurtz@santa-monica.org and roslyn-wythe@santa-monica.org

"IF YOU BUILD IT THEY WILL COME..."

BUILDING THE CITY OF TACOMA'S FIELD OF DREAMS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

by **Brian A. Wilson**

In 1970, the city of Tacoma negotiated a 25-year franchise allowing them to offer cable television to the residents of Tacoma. Grateful for the opportunity to have a variety of viewing channels, Tacoma staff never bothered to ask for cable access channels, PEG access support or a franchise fee. No one had ever heard of them, much less understood what they might mean to a community.

By 1996, the city was negotiating for a franchise renewal and had established city standards and policies for all telecommunications companies seeking to do business in Tacoma. The resulting telecommunications rights-of-way ordinance states how, when and where companies can use the rights-of-way to provide advanced telecommunications services. With the new ordinance in place, Tacoma began negotiations with both the incumbent TCI and a new player in town, Click! Network. Click! Network is a municipally-owned cable television and broadband services network, a commercial-retail business, that is a division of Tacoma Public Utilities. Click! is an overbuild, which is competing directly now with AT&T Cable Services. In 1998, the city of Tacoma completed its negotiations with Click! and TCI (AT&T) and signed a cable agreements with both companies.

Prior to starting negotiations with Click! on its cable agreement, the newly formed cable company proposed constructing an institutional network (I-Net) for the city in lieu of paying franchise fees or PEG capital support for the life of its ten-year cable agreement. The city was quick to recognize that having the use of an I-Net for ten years was not as good a deal as receiving cable television revenue that it could use to support other communications projects. The offer was rejected. However, the city recognized the benefits of having an I-Net, so as negotiations continued both cable companies were asked to submit an I-Net proposal to be included in their cable/franchise agreements.

AT&T's proposal consisted of constructing and managing an I-Net for the city's use, at a modest monthly fee. Click!'s proposal outlined the building of an I-Net that matched the footprint of Click!'s own cable and broadband network. Construction would be at the city's cost and direction. Under this scenario, the city owned the I-Net and negotiated with Click! for maintenance and service at a cost. The city chose the Click! proposal.

Since Click! was building a network from the ground up, the city would only pay incremental costs for its I-Net construction. What has been estimated at costing other cities the size of Tacoma between \$7 and \$10 million, Tacoma would own for \$1.4 million.

Both the cable and franchise agreements contained other benefits for the city. Each provider would allocate six cable access channels for the city's use, with trigger language for two additional channels; five percent of its gross revenues in cable/franchise fees; and one percent of its gross revenue for PEG capital support. Although the city chose not to accept AT&T's I-Net proposal, the language outlining it is in the franchise agreement and can be triggered at the city's request at any time. The anticipated revenue from these two agreements is expected to be \$14 million over a

10-year term or approximately \$1.4 million annually.

To oversee the I-Net process, Tacoma organized a team including representatives from potential user agencies, city staff with experience in voice, video and data transmission, legal experts, and representatives of the Click! Network. Potential I-Net sites were identified and mapped, complimentary cable

sites were also identified and a step-by-step process on how users could get connected was drafted. Concentrating on how to capitalize on the negotiated benefits, the city moved quickly to take advantage of incremental costs while the cable company was constructing its plant. As construction began on Click!'s cable build out, so did the construction of the I-Net.

Tacoma's I-Net consists of two components—digital fiber with a SONET platform, mirroring the Click! broadband services network, for voice and data, and a hybrid fiber coaxial cable component for video distribution.

Although agencies riding on the digital I-Net could send video from site to site, the HFC Net offered the best transmission quality for video at the time. The high split configuration has between six and 200 MHz upstream and 250 to 750 MHz downstream. Working with Click! Network, the city was able to locate a vendor who could supply the much-needed high split node. At an estimated cost of \$4,000 per node, the total cost for the HFC Net nodes was just over \$200K. Although originally wanting more, Tacoma was forced to settle on only five upstream channels.

The digital I-Net consists of the main SONET ring, six hubs and eleven service loops that go out to the nodes. This multiple-ring configuration consists of a large loop providing the backbone. On the backbone are the six hubs strategically located throughout the city. Off the hubs are the service loops extending into every neighborhood in the city. Built out to the node, the distance from the node to any one of the 300 identified possible I-Net sites is no more than one quarter mile. At the time Tacoma was deciding on the design of the I-Net using SONET platform made sense. Today, ATM and gigabyte Ethernet operate just as well and there may not be the need for using the SONET platform. SONET requires a very hefty up-front expense to build out. Any agency in Tacoma must pay for their own equipment costs, the last quarter mile for connection and a monthly service fee.

This design gave the I-Net the capability to integrate video, voice and data. It provides high capacity and bandwidth that can cost users considerably less than leased lines from an ILEC or CLEC. Because separate services can operate securely over one fiber, the city can offer these services to schools, libraries, government facilities and colleges. Each agency pays a monthly fee to cover the service and maintenance fee paid by the city to Click! Potential network applications include one-way and two-way video, video conferencing, telephony, database access, high-speed data links, communication between computer networks and monitoring video and telemetry. The original design of the system was that of a closed circuit. As Tacoma built out its network, it became clear that its users also wanted Internet access and real dialtone. Without the flexibility to seek these out-of-market services, the I-



Net could become marginalized and under-used. Tacoma decided to pursue partnerships to deliver these out-of-market services with commercial providers.

The city's cable agreement with Click! specifies that a service agreement with them, for the ongoing maintenance and monitoring of the I-Net, be developed. The agreement specifies items such as which agency covers current and future costs, and delineates the responsibilities of each entity. Each agency requesting service must also negotiate an I-Net User Agreement with the city. That agreement contains information about capacity allocations, fees, and expectations of the user and the city. Tacoma's I-Net User Agreements are brought before the city council for approval by vote.

Early in the process, Tacoma invited potential I-Net users to participate in the I-Net Users Group. Meeting weekly at first, and then only when necessary, the purpose of the group was to act as a clearinghouse for information, identify needs, exchange ideas and have an opportunity for open discussion. The original intent was to act as a support group as neither the cable operator or the city wanted to act as a consultant for these potential users. It was obvious that the representatives from the various agencies, non-profits, schools and libraries had varying degrees of expertise. To address this problem, the city created a users manual divided into sections containing the cable agreement and I-Net terms, the service application, the service agreement between Click! and the city, contact information for staff, the users agreement, procedures for ordering service, definitions of terms, a draft design plan of the I-Net, and eventually minutes of the meetings.

For Tacoma, batters were on deck before the pitcher was warmed up. Before the agreements had been fully drafted or ratified, agencies were applying to get service and cost estimates. In December 1998, using federal grant money, the main library and two library branches applied for service and authorized the city to purchase equipment for them. By spring 1999, the library had two more applications for a total of five sites. Because of the rapid change in technology, the equipment expenses between the December and May orders dropped by \$20,000 enabling them to light up one more library branch. Testing has been completed and the libraries initial sites have moved off US West leased lines. Other agencies in the Tacoma area that have applied for service include Tacoma Community College, Bates Technical College, Pierce County and the Tacoma Police Department. The Tacoma Public Schools have negotiated with the city for a unique opportunity to utilize dark fiber to create their own network.

Potential I-Net users are asked to participate in a multi-step process in order to gain access and use of the I-Net. Each agency must fill out a service application. This application is an important step not only because it helps Click! identify needs and recommend equipment, but it factors into the determination of the user fee. Applicants indicate the level of service, bandwidth and capacity they require for their use. The city will accommodate any request from a DS1 to an OC-48. To date all applicants have requested OC3 capacity, which is used primarily for data transport. These users could also purchase a DS1 or DS3 card and insert it into the OC3 shelf and have telephone service as well.

Once the city receives an application, it is reviewed by the technical administrator who meets with the agency. Experience has taught Tacoma staff that even though they didn't want to serve as consultants to users, it saves time and trouble down the

road if the agency's design is reviewed before moving forward. Once the review with the agency is completed, the city passes the application on to Click! for an estimate. Users are not required to purchase equipment from Click! but can take advantage of Click's vendor contracts if they desire.

How do you determine what those maintenance and service fees should be without actually knowing what they may cost, how many users you might have, no way to accurately measure use and no track record or example to look at as a model? The issue for Tacoma was how to make it equitable without actually being able to monitor or meter use. After much hand twisting and a number of strikeout ideas, Tacoma settled on a formula. The monthly fee was calculated based on the amount of capacity requested in the Service Application, plus a site fee and an administration fee. Click! had a city council-approved rate card and since they couldn't make a profit, their rates were already lower than US West. Tacoma city government cut their service rate to half of Click!'s. A flat fee was added per site and finally an additional five-percent on top of the subtotal was added as an administration fee to cover some of the city's staffing costs. The city government rate sheet comes in well below US West for leased lines. Average monthly cost for OC3 service is between \$300-\$400.

A real handicap for the agency players was the need to pay up-front for end user equipment. The I-Net model AT&T proposed offered service and supplied the equipment. While that model didn't appeal to the city, it did appeal to agencies that did not want to own their equipment. Over time it has become clear that the city must offer agencies the opportunity to finance the equipment costs over time, which leaves the city paying for the equipment up front. This is the only way some agencies can justify the cost.

With a variety of possible applications for the HFC Net, staff saw the master control center as essential in order to move video between 60 school district sites and three colleges, and to accommodate the city's use. In addition to the internal uses for the HFC Net, there is an ability to downlink satellite signals that needed to be accommodated. Six to eight cable access channels had to be programmed on two cable systems from multiple users and multiple locations. Any feed on the system had to be capable of being sent out on an access channel. Tacoma immediately determined where this municipal headend should be, who should staff it and how soon it needed to be operational.

There were three steps to building the master control center, the city's headend or nerve center, which calls the plays in this ball game. First, the city hired a consultant to draft the master control center design/build RFP. Second, a contract was issued with a vendor to design, build, install equipment and train staff for the new master control center. Tacoma spent a year on these two steps alone. The third step was the build, which lasted 140 days.

The estimated cost for the master control center is \$750,000 including design and installation. Staffing the center will cost the city \$425,000 a year. Staff includes a communications supervisor, a technical administrator, two playback programmers, and an administrative assistant.

The estimated start-up expenditures include I-Net construction to the node at \$1.4 million, master control center construc-

MUNICIPAL RADIO FOR EMERGENCY USE

by J. Fred Miller

"We want information!" That was the rallying cry of community residents during a heavy snowstorm in 1994 when the city received over 15 inches of snow in one day. Residents were calling city hall, the police department, and the fire department with non-emergency questions. Eventually the telephones became overloaded with calls, jamming the system and rendering it inoperable. The city of Anchorage needed a way to provide information to residents while keeping telephone lines open for emergency communications.

To address this issue, a disaster readiness committee, consisting of the local elected officials and community leaders, was formed to identify communication needs. The Anchorage Information Station was the result of this needs assessment. During natural or man-made disasters, emergency services needed a reliable means of communication with residents, without relying on the power company.

In 1996, Anchorage City Administrator Fred Miller located Information Station Specialists (ISS), a company in the New England area that sells and installs public service AM radio systems to cities and governments. After researching other such providers, ISS was chosen to supply the AM radio transmitter.

ISS came to Anchorage in late 1997 and chose the Anchorage Public School as the best location to install the radio transmitter. ISS chose the location based on height of the building, the coverage area this site provides, and its ample distance away from the railroad, which poses the greatest threat of disaster. The transmitter is in a secure building near the roof of the new gym, and the antenna is located on the roof of the new gym. The system is powered by 110-volt electrical power from the school. Four sealed batteries enable the system to operate for over 72 hours in the event there is a loss of power to the building. Beyond the initial 72 hours, there is the capability to connect to a diesel-powered generator to run the radio during a longer power outage.

When the site and the cost was finalized, the city initiated the budgeting and funding process to purchase the system. There were some delays brought about by joint cooperation with Central State Hospital and Jefferson County Fiscal Court who had earlier expressed interest in a partnership. The city attempted to create a partnership to purchase the transmitter for general public use in the vicinity. Central State Hospital wanted the ability to communicate with their neighbors in the event of an escaped, dangerous patient. It would have meant moving the location of the transmitter from Anchorage School to another more central location, however, Jefferson County and Central State Hospital backed out of the partnership.

Eventually, funding participation from the other sources fizzled and Anchorage funded the whole project. All items were purchased in 1997 for \$13,100. In late 1998, the city completed installation.

Sgt. Matt Goins of the Anchorage Fire



Department oversaw installation of the system. Recordings such as the weather began transmitting on January 19, 1999. The system provides immediate and up to date public information under the control of the Anchorage Fire Department. Programming is as easy as punching numbers on a touch-tone telephone. Dispatchers, on duty 24 hours a day, seven days a week, are trained to play pre-recorded messages in mock disaster drills. The system transmits on channel 1620 on the AM radio dial. The signal can be heard anywhere within the city limits of Anchorage. The transmitter will not exceed 10 watts of output and maximum field strength of 2 mV at a distance of 1.5 kilometers from the transmitter site.

In the two plus years since conceiving the idea and completion, many uses for the AM Information Station have been researched and developed. Its primary use is to rapidly notify the public of important safety information pertaining to emergencies in or near the city of Anchorage. The station operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and there is no commercial broadcasting or playing of music of any type.

Prior to the AM Information Station we relied heavily on letters of notice for these events. All of the above items generated lots of paper that would end up in the trash. This information system has provided a means to disburse information around the city without the large volume of paperwork. In those instances where notice could not be given due to unforeseen circumstances, the AM Information System provides a means of communication to residents that we did not have before. Significant time and indirect cost savings are expected from reducing the number of telephone calls about topics covered by the radio announcements.

Other local governments have used similar systems under different circumstances. Naperville, IL used the AM Advisory Radio during a flood. It was the lone source of information. In 1996 the rain began to fall. "We got 9.7 inches of rain in less than 10 hours," states Bill Reynolds, the city's emergency preparedness director. The local river rose to engulf more than 10,000 homes. Fortunately, the AM radio station was on-line in time to help keep residents informed.

"Since our cable access TV channel was down," recalls Reynolds, "the radio station was our only link to our citizens." The AM Advisory Station changed roles as the flood began, from

EXAMPLES OF BROADCAST INFORMATION INCLUDE:

- ▲ Emergency evacuation routes
- ▲ Shelters—when available and where to find them
- ▲ How to volunteer emergency medical assistance
- ▲ Alternate routes of travel
- ▲ How, When, and Where to return to the city when it's safe to return

Other information broadcast to the public relates to the health and welfare of the community. Examples of these uses include:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| ▲ Road closings | ▲ Road construction |
| ▲ City meetings and agendas | ▲ General law enforcement information |
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the dutiful broadcast of daily city advisories to a full-time flood assistance service. "We gave residents the phone numbers to call for assistance, Red Cross information, FEMA requirements for assistance and every kind of information related to clean-up," says Reynolds.

The fact that the signal was useful to residents during the disaster was not a surprise. It was a known fact that the citizenry was listening. This was evidenced by the reduction in telephone calls to the city for information on mundane topics such as annual leaf pickup, which is one of the subjects covered seasonally on the station.

Many communities across the country use the small AM stations to broadcast visitor and resident information when a disaster is not in the works. Naperville even provides a daily reading of the local newspapers as a service to visually impaired residents.

Anchorage's AM Information Station has not been put to the test in a real disaster yet. It has met our goals and objectives in mock disaster drills and transmits audible, clear signals to residents in Anchorage. In that sense our overall goal has been achieved. More difficult variables yet to be measured include: How many residents are listening during a disaster? How many residents are listening without a disaster? After our first disaster in which the AM Information Station can be put into action, a full detailed review will be conducted to measure the performance.

Today's technology offers all kinds of opportunities for communities to serve residents. Learning how to harness the technology to manage the information is the key to keeping the community happy. Residents have a right to know what's happening in their community, and we have learned that providing information to residents in a timely manner is an important part of our job. We are fortunate to have the AM radio station to provide the information to residents of our community in real time. With the radio we are the managers of the information, not the telephone company or the power company.

J. Fred Miller is city manager of Anchorage, Kentucky. Contact him at cityofanchorage@home.com

TACOMA

continued from page 22

tion for \$750,000 and \$425,000 annually for staff and operations. Annual service fees for Click!'s monitoring and maintenance are approximately \$35,000. The user fees offset some of the costs and the rest is paid through franchise and PEG capital fees.

In retrospect, Tacoma suggests hiring skilled staff early on, if you can find them. Be proactive not reactive. Identify the level of support you can offer I-Net users as soon as possible. A life lesson we experienced: the more you are willing to do or to offer, the more that is expected to be given for nothing. Some clients had very high expectations that cannot necessarily be addressed in an affordable way. And finally, if you are going to pioneer a process, be it cutting or bleeding edge, realize you are alone in your decisions. No one has gone before you, there is no established path or rules and the game will likely go into extra innings. But in the end Tacoma says, if you build it, "go the distance."

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